

# Chapel Pennant

# “The Gift of Gifts”

Each Christmas we shop carefully for the "right gift", that is the gift that will accurately express our love and friendship for another. The deepest value of any gift is not what another can use it for or do with it. The true value of any gift is in its ability to represent us or make us present in the life of the person we give it to. That is why it is so important to get the "right gift". For a gift is an extension, a representation of me and my concern, love, friendship for another. However, in the final analysis, the only real gift worthy of another person and desired by another is the gift of oneself. However, as we cannot be at all places at all times and all things to everyone simultaneously, the gift must take our place, that is make us present to the other when we cannot be there.

The worst possible gift is the gift given instead of giving oneself. It is the problem of the rich who can give things instead of giving of themselves. The poor can only give symbolic gifts, that is why these gifts are so valuable. The inappropriate gifts, which young children often give, are highly prized by parents because they are only symbolic, often of no practical value; these gifts symbolize only the love of the giver, and not much else.

At Christmastime, Christians celebrate the coming of Jesus, believed to be the Son of God, coming as our Savior. He Himself becomes the final or ultimate gift of our God to us his people. For this God had already given so much already, but never himself. As starters this God had given us the gift of creation, his handiwork for our use, support, and enjoyment. Then he had given us His Word in the stories and writings of the Scriptures, that we might come to know more about him and his love for us. It is a long story with many detours, but every page is a gift to self-revelation, in which God tells us more and more about himself and us as his beloved children. Finally having given us all of these preparatory gifts, he gave us his own son, born of a woman in Bethlehem. Through this Son, he gives us his own life, that we might become like him and one with him. In doing so our God has revealed the "gift of gifts", which will always be the gift of self.

As we spend these final days finding the “right gift” for a special person, let us be sure we do our best and to paraphrase the words of the Hallmark Card Company, “care enough to give the very best,” the gift of ourselves.

## Palace soon to be home to coalition forces

**By Sgt. 1st Class Marcia Triggs**  
BAGHDAD, Iraq (Army News Service, Dec. 21, 2003) – While Iraq's former leader was hiding in holes, Sgt. Maj. Mikel Dawson was busy entertaining guests in one of Saddam Hussein's palaces and getting it ready to house Coalition Joint Task Force-7.

The Alfaw palace, located near Baghdad International Airport, has 60 rooms, 29 bathrooms and is the centerpiece on a 155-building compound, said Dawson, the Alfaw palace maintainer.

About 17 international and U.S. companies are involved in an ongoing, joint venture to transform the palace into a world-class CJTF-7 headquarters, said Sgt. Maj. Alex Branch, the C-3, logistics, sergeant major.

A lot of money is being put into this project, but it's not just to upgrade one building, Branch said. Improvements will be made in the surrounding community to help maintain an operational headquarters, he added.

"The palace was chosen to be CJTF-7's headquarters because it's easy to defend with a small number of troops, it's in the center of Baghdad and it doesn't displace civilians, said Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Preston, the CJTF-7 sergeant major.

The spacious palace is mostly unfurnished because it was looted by the Iraqis during a one-week period between a time when the 3rd Infantry Division, from Fort Stewart, Ga., left the palace, and the V Corps out of Germany arrived there, Preston said.

“Coalition forces took control of government and former regime property because we needed total control in the beginning of the war,” Preston said. “Also, we had to protect the properties because looters were destroying them.”

Alfaw is one of about 50 palaces located in Baghdad. Coalition forces or the Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq's interim government, have command over all the palaces for now. Preston said that the Coalition is slowly shrinking its base operations to gradually hand over property and security to the Iraqis.

There are 30 major Coalition operating bases now -- and that will shrink to four eventually, Preston said.

Sitting in the middle of the desert, Alfaw is surrounded by man-made lakes and palm trees. It looks like it was made for a giant in size instead of stature. Dozens of chandeliers adorned with crystal-size plastic ornaments on gold-plated chains hang from the palace's high ceilings.

Gold seems to be the theme of the décor. All door knobs and handles are gold plated, and gold etchings are found in every room, including the bathrooms.

"The enormity and gaudiness of the palace made me sick to my stomach," said Sgt. Darrow Orlandi, a fire direction specialist from Babenhausen, Germany.

The Iraqi children run on hot gravel and rocks with no shoes and socks, Orlandi said. They run to Soldiers asking for food and wa-



Sgt. 1st Class K.C. Delagarza, a Reserve engineer from New York, stands guard at the Alfar palace, which is soon to become headquarters for Coalition Joint Task Force-7

ter because they are starving, he said. What Saddam did to the Iraqi people is a slap in the face to humanity, Orlandi added.

A film crew was recently in the palace to put together a documentary on how Saddam lived, Dawson said. It will air to show the Iraqis why they had to live the way they did, he added.

In the interim of the transformation, the palace serves as billeting for guests. It is rumored that the palace belonged to one of the former dictator's sons, and was used as guest housing, Orlandi said.

If true, the palace still houses guests. Celebrities such as comedian Drew Carey, ac-

tor Robert Dinero and Vince McMahon, the owner and chairman of the World Wrestling Federation, have stayed at the Alfaw palace while entertaining troops in the area.

"People are in and out of the palace constantly," Dawson said. "in the beginning of the war it housed 450 Soldiers. We threw pool parties and built a makeshift barbeque pit."

The Soldiers were moved out of the palace because the hot water, electricity, heating and air-conditioning units are not operational throughout the compound, Dawson said. However, the headquarters is scheduled to be furnished and fully operational by Feb. 1, he added.